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'Open' Social Housing To Accommodate Diversity: A Case Study Of The University Village Albany, California, USA, Before The Redevelopment

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INTRODUCTION

The University Village Albany, also known as "Albany Village", is a multifamily housing complex for UC Berkeley students, doctorates and visiting scholars, having started in 1940's. The population is culturally diverse with about half of the residents being international students or scholars, dominantly Chinese and Koreans. Before the last redevelopment that took place in 1998-2008, there were 104 apartment buildings with 920 units on 62 acres of land (Fig.1). The housing consisted of three different sections: 'Codornices' and 'Kula Gulf' were called Section A as a group and were built in the 1940's (Fig.2). 'Residential Apartments' also known as Section B was built in the 1960's (Fig.3). Each section had different types of units that ranged from studios to 3-bedroom apartments (Fig.4). Each type had an almost identical floor plan except for some minor differences according to its location, that is, downstairs or upstairs, at the edge or in the middle of the building. The other common thing was that at least one household member was a student or scholar of UC Berkeley. With these factors in common, the life-style differences caused by residents' cultural backgrounds was clearly observed.

The project started as a conversion of the military barracks for the WWII. Due to the facilities' temporary nature, replacement plans for the Village had been discussed since the very beginning of its history. However, it continued to function much longer than

expected. Only half of the site was replaced in 1960's to make 'Section B'. Finally in early 1997 the University announced the entire redevelopment. There was, however, a funding issue. The university did not subsidize the Village, and the budget of redevelopment solely depended on its own income. The rent was anticipated to go up by 35 - 85% for the new units to cover its construction. This proposed rent was already beyond afford-ability for many residents who lived on a limited income such as University grants and TA/RA salary. The rent actually went up by 100-200% because of the inflation in construction industry in early 2000's. As a consequence, the demography of the Village changed drastically after the redevelopment.

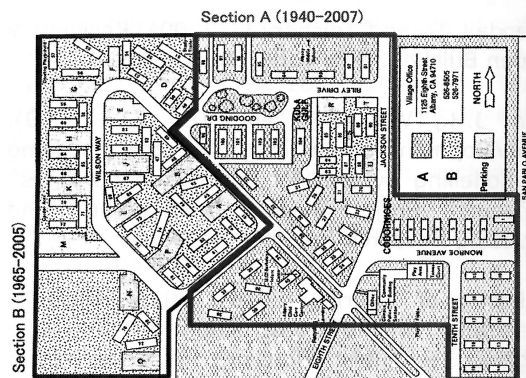


Fig.1 UVA Site as of 1996
from the residents' guidebook, Not to scale

'OPEN' SOCIAL HOUSING TO ACCOMMODATE DIVERSITY

At the time of redevelopment planning in 1990's, "trade-off" was discussed. Given the limited budget of both the University and the residents, they must have found a point of a minimum-acceptable standard and a maximum-payable rent to keep the housing affordable to all. The demands of the residents of University Village Albany are so diverse that they could not measure the value of the environment with a single scale. There were huge differences in afford-ability and desired living standards among residents, and social and cultural backgrounds would also influence one's preference in spatial design and community interaction. There was also a discussion such that the resources in University Village should have been distributed to the ones who would benefit most from them: It would be fairer and more resource-effective than giving everybody the same thing.

Accommodating diversity may seem to require a diverse setting. It would not make sense, however, to provide a variety of different apartment designs because it could cost a lot, and the high turnover of occupants could waste such effort. The average tenure in such a student housing is only 2 years. High demand of housing with long waiting list would make it difficult to assign a right home to a right family. Therefore, the space in the units should be flexible enough to accommodate various ways of living, especially in a multi-cultural housing. The old Section B two-bedroom unit was successful in this sense, and the residents were using the identical apartments in totally different ways.

They could provide various settings more effectively by site planning and landscape design. Not only could this way be more cost-effective than various unit designs, but also landscape design could play a significant role in determining the character of the community. Open-space preference in the University Village is more universal than apartment usage patterns. The author was in the redevelopment design committee and proposed these ideas. The finally chosen redevelopment plan, however, turned out to be the opposite way – various unit designs in uniform site planning.



Fig.2 Section-A apartments (1996, Suzuki)



Fig.3 Section-B 1BR apartment (1996, Suzuki)

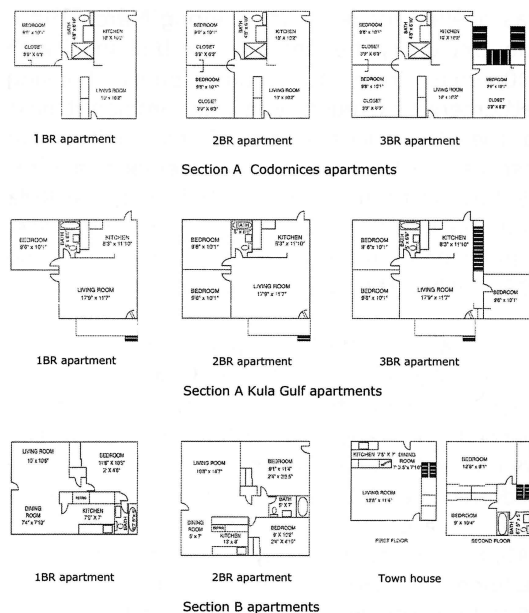


Fig.4 Apartment plans (1996)
from the residents' guidebook, Not to scale

HISTORY OF THE SITE SINCE 1890

In 1890, Edward Gill, a horticulturist, bought 104 acres of land including the present University Village Albany to establish his nursery. In 1928 the University of California bought the land for \$450,000 for academic use. The cost was \$4,300 per acre, which turned out to be a good investment. In 1939, approximately 15 acres of it was turned over to US Department of Agriculture to establish the Western Regional Research Center.

During World War II, the government requisitioned most of the remaining UC property for a wartime housing project. In 1943, the Federal Housing authority constructed Codornices Village straddling over Codornices Creek to house shipyard workers (No. CAL 4479). It contained identical eight-unit two-story buildings with a total of 1,896 units -- 1,056 in City of Berkeley and 840 in City of Albany, which was bigger than the current University Village.

The Kula Gulf Navy Housing Project, named for the World War II Battle of Kula Gulf, was opened for occupancy during March 1946. The University bought the 14 buildings with 100 units from a wartime public housing settlement in Oregon, and reassembled it next to the Codornices Village. These units were reserved for US Navy combat members and for US Navy veterans. Despite their age, the Kula Gulf buildings remained one of the most popular units in the University Village until the 1990's when they were finally demolished.

When W.W.II ended, the Federal Housing Authority and UC Berkeley turned the Village apartments into student housing for married veterans. In 1956, the University bought 420 apartments — 320 from the Codornices and 100 apartments from the Kula Gulf — and other community facilities for \$40,000 in total. They rehabilitated these buildings in 1956-58 for the total cost of \$634,850. This was done to provide for married students and was called "University Village". These rehabilitated units were called "temporary" at that time, which was financed by a 10-year loan. The remaining 132 buildings

located in Berkeley were dismantled and the land was returned to its former owners.

In 1962, the university completed the 500 new "permanent" Section B apartments in the west half of the site after some buildings were demolished and some streets were repositioned. The architects were William Wurster and Theodore Bernardi, who were also on the faculty of UC Berkeley, at that time. The contractor was John E. Branagh & Sons from Piedmont, California. The cost for building Section B was estimated to have been \$3,871,000, and the US Community Facilities Administration of the House and Home Finance Agency financed it. The indebtedness was to be paid by occupant rental fees, which at the time ranged from \$70 to \$90 per month.

Both the rehabilitated temporary units and the new permanent units were financially successful. The revenue covered the loan and has shown a consistent profit, even with the artificially low rent. It was made possible because the land was debt-free, infrastructures such as roads were already installed under federal authority, and both projects were done before inflation. However, not having made any financial contributions to future replacements caused some problems later.

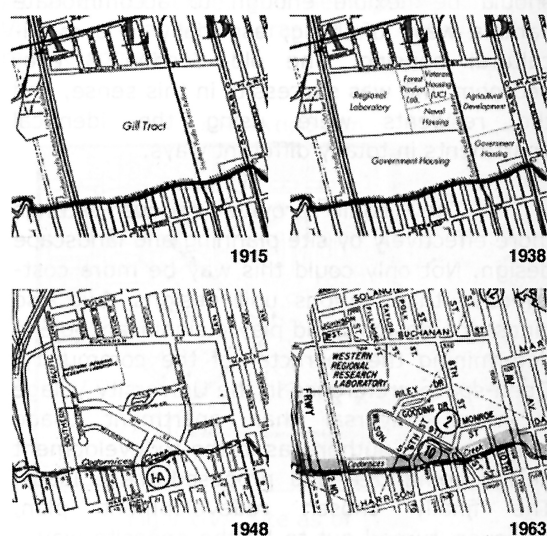


Fig. 5 History of the site from municipal maps

REDEVELOPMENT EFFORTS, 1962- 1998

The Long Range Development Plan of University of California, Berkeley, published in June 1962 indicated that the whole area would be replaced with new apartment buildings with a total 930 units. The report also suggested that it would be desirable to increase the number of married student housing beyond the 930 units in the future but no additional lands were available and appropriate for this use. As of 1962, the University had just completed the first half of the plan, which was called Section B (361,000 square feet). The second half (309,000 square feet) called "Married Students Apartments Group 2" was never realized.

There were several rent-protests by the residents. In May 1965, a delegation of spouses, who were mostly wives at that time, protested at the housing office against a rent increase, which was \$8 for Codornices and Kula Gulf (13-23%) and \$5 for Section B (5-7%). Probably because of that effort, there was no rent increase for the next 3 years. After this, the rent went up occasionally by the range between 0 to 17%, and became about double by 1980. In April 1980, Vice Chancellor Robert Kerley's Advisory Committee on Housing drew up a master plan including rent increase of about 15 to 25% above the inflationary costs to subsidy future renovation. In June 1981, Chancellor Heyman's Office enacted a 25% rent increase. The residents resorted to a rent strike, which was withholding of the increase for two months until they got a rent policy agreement. This ended up with a 20% increase for 1981, then 2 to 13% per year -- mostly in the lower range -- until 1994. These percentage rent increases of the Village during the period of 1962 to 1994, however, are not at all bigger than that of market-rate rent in Albany, although it is bigger than that of Berkeley, where rent-control keeps the market-rate low.

The planners at the Office of Property Development, UCB, conducted several researches on the Village residents in 1980s to incorporate the residents' information into their plan. In 1989, the planners conducted resident survey, which covered an extensive range of

topics to great depths. They interviewed 60 residents for approximately 2 hours each and asked twenty pages of questions. They also organized 8 community meetings during the year of 1989 and 1990 to identify special needs for different groups and different topics. In 1991 and 1992, the planners applied for the University Gift Campaign to compete for funding for several purposes regarding family housing redevelopment including a 6 million dollar fund to subsidize the rent payment of low-income students. However, they could not compete against the large number of academic projects. In 1992, the University planners organized the Master Plan and the Program Committees, which included UC administrators, academics, Village residents and staff, and concerned local government officials. In 1993, they presented the first draft of the Master Plan to the concerned parties. In 1995, Housing and Dining Services proposed a funding strategy with a yearly 5-6 percent rent-increase for 5 successive years. The Village Resident Advocacy Association, which was the antecedent of VRA, formed a petition with 800 residents' signature to protest this rent-increase. Then, the campus organized the Future Family Student Housing Task Force (FFSHTF) to solicit more residents' opinions.

In 1996, a physical and cost study was completed. The FFSHTF established that the minimum-possible rent for the new units should be 15 percent below market, or \$650 for 1 bedroom, \$750 for 2 bedroom and \$850 for 3 bedroom apartments respectively. These are about 35-50% above the rent of Section B units, and about 70-100% above that of Codornices and Kula Gulf. In February and March of 1997, the university's senior architect and the senior planner held several community meetings with residents and concerned civic leaders to present their final draft master plan and solicited opinions. Although the issues of funding and rent-increase remained, in March 1997, the executive director for undergraduate affairs, Housing, Dining and Child Care Services announced that they would start the first phase of the redevelopment plan in August 1998. Then, those who were living in to-be-demolished buildings were asked to vacate their unit by that time.

THE REDEVELOPMENT PLAN IN 1990's

As one of initial plans discussed in 1990's, some perimeter of the Village was to be marketed in order to generate additional income to defray the cost of the housing replacement. Harrison Street properties were designated as mix-use or light industrial in the West Berkeley Plan, and could have been sold or leased for such land use. These properties of total 13 acres were vacant except the homeless shelter run 24 hours a day by a nonprofit organization, Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency (BOSS). The University continued to lease the shelter site to the city of Berkeley, in accordance with the 1990 Cooperative Relations Agreement. The city of Berkeley negotiated to purchase of the 4th & Harrison parcel for use as youth athletic fields as well as for the shelter. The portion of Codornices section along San Pablo Avenue was designated as commercial/residential mix-use in the city of Albany zoning. The University tried to lease the land for such mix-use development to gain additional income, however it did not go easily because of various circumstances. The Gill Tract site (15 acres) would be reserved for academic uses.

Remarkable change made in the master plan written in 1997 was that there was no presupposed circulation system and utility corridor, giving designers enough latitude for creativity and cost-saving strategies. The existing infrastructure was the legacy from the World War II and has no coherence with the larger urban context at that time.

In the first step, the 420 units built in the 1940s (Section A) were replaced. The first phase started in the middle of 1998, with the replacement of buildings west of Jackson Street (all Kula Gulf section and #20 - #40 of Codornices section). A part of Section B housing surrounded by these building (#83 - #90) was replaced at the same time depending on the site plan and economic considerations. The Codornices section east of Jackson Street (#1 - #19) continued to accommodate the demand for the lowest-rent housing while waiting for the mix-use development plan on this site to be fully established.

In the second step, 500 units of Section B built in 1960s underwent a major renovation or replacement, which took far longer time than expected. The third step would be the renovation or replacement of the community facilities, which has not been implemented as of 2012. The cost of renovation was estimated to be as much as 70 percent of that of replacement, therefore the replacement was assumed in the master plan. The funding for the second and third step could not be secured as initially planned due to the hike of construction cost in early 2000's. Each step was further divided into phases in order to minimize the number of units out of service at any one time, to maintain a significant inventory of student family housing, and to ease the transition of rent for existing tenants.

The plan was subject to review in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) amended in 1970. The plan conducted by the University for its academic mission would not be subject to the local governments' land use controls. The campus, however, had to accommodate the needs of the host community as long as it did not interfere with the goals and objectives of the University. Any private development would be subject to local land use regulations.

Alteration of Codornices Creek and/or Village Creek subjected to the jurisdiction of the US Army Corps of Engineers, the California Department of Fish and Games (DFG), and the Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB). Later, the issue of creek alteration in terms of ecological preservation was used for the lawsuit filed by the former residents to stop the redevelopment, however the residents could not win the case.

The California Department of Transportation, the State Energy Commission, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, and the Conservation Department also reviewed the project. Open spaces, greenery and recreation facilities of the University Village had been contributing to the larger community. Therefore, the city of Albany and many neighbors were very much interested in the redevelopment.

THE DEFINITION OF 'AFFORDABILITY'

A family student housing ought to be affordable. The majority of residents thought so in 1996. It was considered a key to an accessible education for all. In the case of University Village Albany, however, the definition of "affordable" differed between planners and residents. The rents ranged from \$305 (Section A studio) to \$550 (Section B town-house) in 1995. The proposed new rents, were \$650 for 1 bedroom, \$750 for 2 bedroom and \$850 for 3 bedroom in 1995 dollars. The university planners found that the new rents were 15% below the market rate in their cross-section survey on students' rents and real estate market in Bay Area as of 1995. According to another market study in 1996, the prevailing competitive rent in the area was even higher; \$825, \$1000, and \$1250 for the 1-, 2-, and 3-bedroom units respectively; and a yearly rent inflation was 3%.

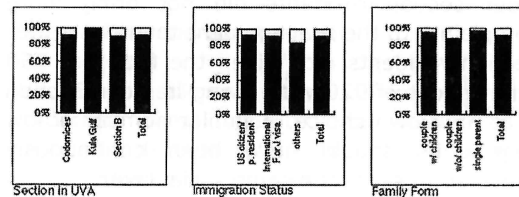
According to the survey, which the author's team conducted in 1996, however, more than 90% of respondents expressed that these rent would be beyond their affordability (Fig.6). It seemed especially serious for those who depend solely on their TA/RA salary or University fellowships, which was the case for about 40% of the respondent according to the survey. While the Village rent was being almost doubled every 10 years (Fig.7), University support did not caught up with it. Many residents also expressed that they could find more reasonable housing other than the Village so they would move out.

The rent was \$199 to \$373 in 1989 when most of the respondents answered that they were willing to pay more rent for improvements. As of July 1997, the rent is \$320 to \$583 and some residents have begun to move out or move from a newer unit to an older unit because they could not afford the new rent. The management warned one of those residents that the older units had health-hazardous building materials, and she showed concern about the risk to her little daughter's health. Eventually, however, she moved to an older unit in the Kula Gulf section. Although the University is responsible to have student living

in safe and healthy apartments, some residents had no choice because of their financial status.

Another issue was the higher market-rate rent in the city of Albany than nearby cities, mainly because of its highly evaluated school district. Many parents of school-age children wish to move into Albany, though this is not a value for those who are without children at all. Most of Village parent-residents were strongly interested in their children's education. Therefore, less-expensive private housing in nearby cities could not be an alternative choice for these residents.

Q. Could you afford to pay \$650 for 1-bedroom, \$750 for 2-bedroom, and \$850 for 3-bedroom? (yes = white, no = shaded)



Q. Was the inexpensive housing a reason why you chose UC Berkeley? (yes = white, no = shaded)

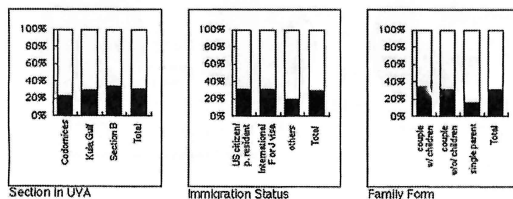


Fig.6 Affordability and housing demand

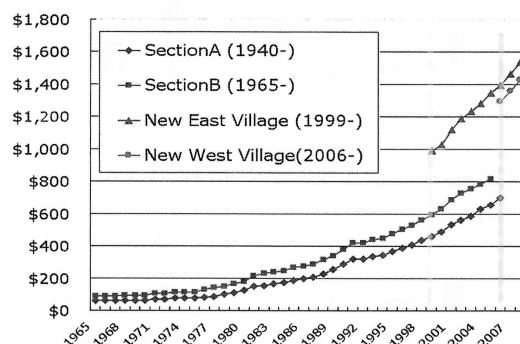


Fig.7 Rent inflation 1965-2007

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DIVERSITY

In the 1996 survey with 300 responses, some of the respondents was willing to pay more rent for the better environment or had decided to save money while being a student. However, majority of the respondents simply could not afford to pay any higher rent. The Village's three sections were accommodating such economic diversity well. There was no class anxiety between different sections. In 1996-1997, when the rent continued to go up, about 5% of unit-transferring requests were made for moving from the newer section B to the older section A because of financial reasons. Although the older section A were in much worse condition than the newer section B, the older section residents did not bring more complaints to the management than the newer section residents did. Given the fact that 250 families out of 920 were living in older Section A at their own choice, a similar number of low rent units should have been continuously provided to serve the same social layer.

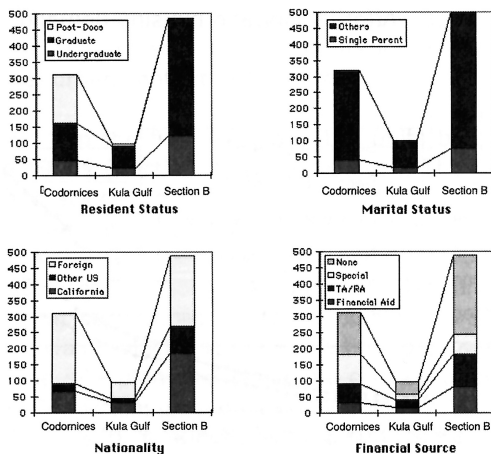
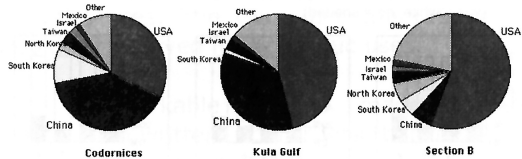
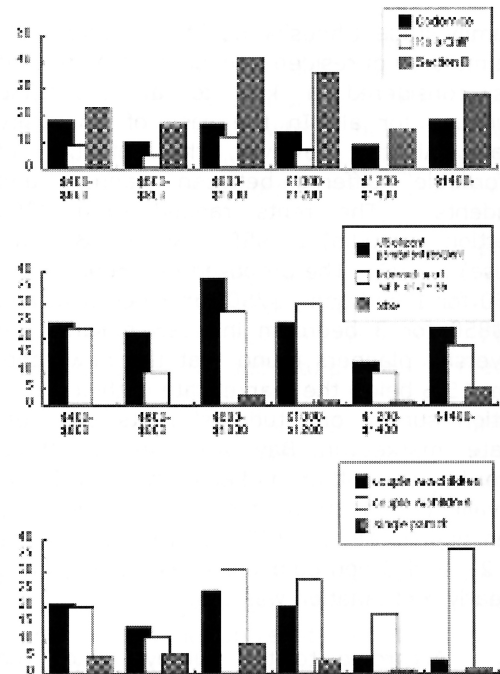


Fig. 8 Social diversity

Q. How Much Is Your Monthly Budget (Excluding Tuition)?



Q. What Is the Source of Your Income?

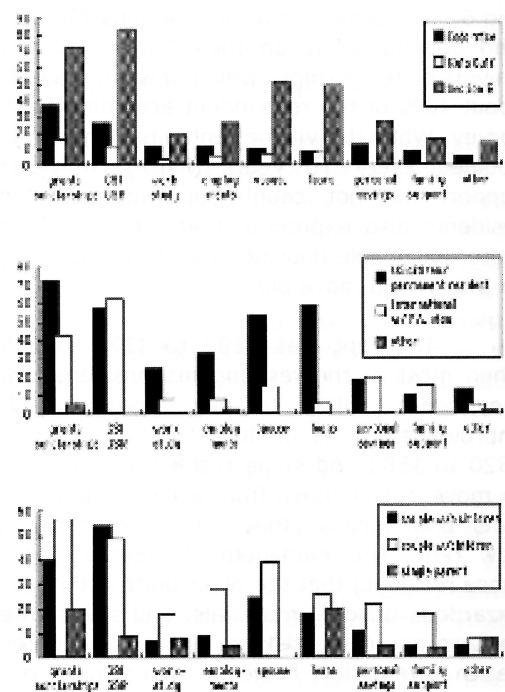


Fig. 9 Economic diversity

DISCUSSIONS ON 'DIVERSITY'

Questions To the Idea of Rent-Subsidy

Subsidizing residents who could not afford higher rents was often discussed, but it did not happen for several reasons. First, an additional funding for such subsidy had to be found from some outside source. Second, some residents might think that it was unfair that subsidized people pay less money than they do to have a same apartment, unless there is a special reason such as disability. It might make rent to be a "secret" issue among neighbors, which could weaken the sense of community. Third, some residents might think they should hide their income, or they might choose not to work hard in order to keep their income low to keep higher-income people to help pay their rent. The sliding-scale fee was applied to public child-care systems because children should be treated equally regardless their parent's income. In case of housing, however, not everybody needs the American standard of luxurious housing. In fact most residents were willing to tolerate sub-standard housing for this period of being a student, according to the VRA survey. The university could leave an option of minimum-standard and minimum-rent housing for those who need it.

Flexible Apartment Assignment

Flexible apartment assignment could have saved various problems. For example, apartment sharing could be more encouraged to help effective distribution of space and expensive facilities such as kitchen and bathroom. Apartment sharing by multiple families could ease residents from the rent burden, and was already common in some places in the world including big cities in China especially until 1990's. The two- or more-bedroom units could be assigned to multiple single-parent families. It would reduce the burden of housekeeping and baby-sitting as well as rent payment. It might also help them from the feeling of isolation. They could also assign one-bedroom units to a single parent family with small children, although it was actually limited to childless couples.

Downstairs versus Upstairs

In the older Village with poor sound insulation, downstairs apartments usually suffered from noise, security problems and sunlight deficiency, and therefore the housing assignment office often had difficulty in filling downstairs while there was a long waiting list for the upstairs. This non-preferable special diversity could be turned into an advantage by giving downstairs apartments such as private yard or a bigger space. It could also be possible to locate three-bedroom apartments downstairs. The tenants with small children or many children could have appreciated the easier access to outside. Keeping children downstairs could also help the noise concerns.

Parents versus Non-parents

Whether residents have children or not influenced their environmental preference a great deal. In both in the old and new Villages, parent residents appreciate the following aspects of the Village, regardless of their background: plenty of open-spaces and playgrounds; safety; highly-evaluated school district; the city-run child-care center on site. The shorter waiting list and tenure of living of 1-bedroom apartments indicates that the University Village was not necessarily the best place for families without children. These residents expressed the following concerns: noise and misbehavior of children; inconvenience of the location far from the campus, shopping area or BART; children-oriented operation of the Village (Suzuki, et al., 1996). Childless couple would not really need such a family student housing, because they could find an affordable apartment more easily in the City of Berkeley near campus.

Urban Zone versus Suburban Zone

Some residents said the Village was too dense and needs more privacy, and others said it was so widely spread that they felt isolated. These opinions are subjective largely depending on where a resident came from, and there is no "right" density for everyone. Different density zoning of the old Village was providing choices and also optimizing the land resources.

Car Access versus Walk-able Green

It was obvious that most residents appreciate the spacious open-space and green in the old Village, however the new Village needed to gain density to accommodate the same or larger number of households within the reduced acreage. It was difficult to have a convenient car access and pedestrians' safety at the same time. Section A had continuous green open space, in which children could play in larger territory. However, some units could not have a direct access to their parking lot, which means the residents had to walk with their baggage, or even with their furniture when moving. In Section B, each building had its parking lot next to it. However, the whole area felt much less green because these huge parking lots intruding deep into the housing area. As the result, small children needed to be kept within their enclosed courtyard because there were cars running everywhere. UC Davis family housing, which was also built in 1960's as the Village Section B was, used the site plan scheme like the Village Section A. They sacrificed the most convenient car access and successfully secured a walk-able green zone by limiting the parking lots at the perimeter circulating the housing area.

Courtyard versus Open Yard

Clustering buildings around a courtyard is the convenient form in terms of management because the boundary of "a community" becomes clearer. It works well, however, only when the community is spontaneously made by the kinship or at the participants' choice. At the University Village, apartments were 'assigned' by the waiting list and residents had almost no choice of a community. The old Village's three-section structure somehow sorted out residents according to their socioeconomic status. When residents are socially and culturally mixed, a courtyard could be a place for conflicts. In fact some racial segregation cases were observed within a courtyard of Section B. Caucasian residents like to socialize within their courtyard, whereas Asians often get together with their own cultural or language group and see it as their 'community'. Different perceptions of 'shared' place of different culture could also cause problems. For example, Asian people liked to hang their laundry from their balcony facing the courtyard and left their shoes outside the

door in the shared corridor. Some do not care, but the others might hate it. The enclosure in a courtyard often makes streets outside the boundary less livable. A small and secured space might be desirable for infants, but older children and adults need bigger sphere to explore and socialize.



Fig. 10 Section B courtyard (1996 Suzuki)

Diverse Use of the Same Apartment

Architectural design of Section B apartments was successful in terms of accommodating tight budgets, high density and various lifestyles. In the survey with 12 families of various cultural backgrounds (Suzuki et al., 1996), we observed different usage of the identical apartments that characterize each culture. Anglo-American families preferred personal spaces and tend to assign a room to a specific member, whereas Asian families preferred flexible use of spaces and tend to assign a shared room to a specific purpose.

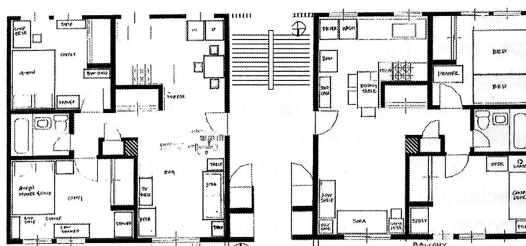


Fig. 11 Section B apartments showing various usage of an identical room

CONCLUSION

Many former resident of the old University Village Albany said that the community was wonderful even though the apartment building were pathetic. Architectural design of Section B apartments was successful in terms of accommodating various life-styles. It happened because the plan made simple. Simple plan was thought out to save the construction budget, which allowed economic diversity as the consequence. Then, the economic diversity resulted in the interesting cultural diversity.

We cannot measure the value of a housing with one single scale. In the case of the University Village Albany, most Americans would not consider taking a Section A unit unless they had a strong will to save money. People from other countries, however, often said that the Section A buildings were not so bad. In addition, the section A site was more luxurious in terms of density and natural features than the newer Section B. It might have meant nothing for Americans, but could be very special for people who came from dense cities. Different people have different standards and sets of values, and it is better to give them choices in an economically and culturally diverse community.

University Village Albany could have become a wonderful educational place to learn social, cultural and natural diversity. In the current Village after the redevelopment, it seems not working the same way. There are far more varieties in room layout plans and building designs, and the management is much more ordered now. Ironically, it seems to have reduced the residents' personalization of their environment. There are less characteristics in how they use the apartments even though residents' demography is still as culturally diverse as it was before. It is also testified by many people that residents use the open spaces less actively than they did before the redevelopment. It may be because of the different concept of the housing plan. However, his hypothesis requires further studies because the social environment worldwide has changed drastically for the last twenty years and people's lifestyle is becoming more uniform.

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